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ABSTRACT

Though brief, this paper provides a step-by-step outline of a technique employed for providing a more effective and efficient diagnostic-treatment model for working with children who appear destined for special class placement and/or significant adjustment difficulties. The specific objectives for each participating child are: (1) improve classroom performance; (2) develop increased personal awareness; (3) increase communication skills; (4) improve functioning within the family. Using an 18 session (9 week) group counseling format, the model requires the involvement of the classroom teacher, the parent(s), and the school psychologist, all working together as a team. Other school personnel, if available, are encouraged to participate. elements of the project include: (1) methods of identifying the children; (2) pre- and posttesting on academic and self-concept scales, as well as behavior evaluations by the teacher and parents; (3) a format for the group counseling sessions; (4) a format for weekly parent education sessions; (5) a communication system for working with the classroom teachers; (6) provision for final individual teacher and parent conferences which sum up conclusions and recommendations; and (7) a format for a brief written report which may be filed by the psychologist in the cumulative folder. At this point another school requests the project and the cycle begins again. (Author)

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UNMET NEEDS - An Intervention Approach; Improving the Mental Health of Students and Staff

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A Position Statement on a practical and highly successful group counseling model which serves to bring together parents, students, teachers, an intern school psychologist and a school psychologist working as a team on the "Unmet Needs" of elementary students is herewith submitted to the First International Colloquium on School Psychology.

The essential purpose of this project is preventative; that is, it is designed to identify, screen and work intensively on school adjustment problems before they escalate to the point that referrals to psychologists, Special Education, and/or public and private agencies become necessary and serve to validate and set the problem behavior.

The chronological elements of the model are: (1) an elementary school requests the nine week-long program; (2) a faculty orientation is held regarding the details of the program; (3) each teacher, on a one page form, refers two to three problem students who could profit from participation in the project; (4) ten kindergarten through third grade students and ten fourth through sixth grade "winners" are selected from all the recommendations submitted by the teachers. The remainder who were not selected are prioritized and placed on a waiting list. The selection committee might consist of the principal, the psychologists involved, a teacher and/or learning specialist assigned to that campus; (5) the parents of the selected students are invited to an evening orientation meeting to hear the details of the project and, if interested in participating, sign a permission form; (6) twice a week, then, for nine weeks, the children meet for group counseling sessions (the younger group and the older group meet separately); (7) once a week for nine weeks, the parents meet for parent education classes; (8) the psychologist and the intern school psychologist are available over the school lunch hour for informal communication with the teachers; (9) pre and post testing of the children includes the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale, the Draw-A-Person, and the Wide Range Achievement Test; (10) pre and post behavior evaluations are also solicited from the involved teachers and the principal on a rating scale directed to key classroom and playground behavior; (11) final individual teacher and parent conferences are held summing up conclusions and recommendations; (12) a brief written report is filed by the psychologist in the cumulative folder reflecting the results of pre and post evaluations and final recommendations;

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(13) another elementary school requests the project and the process begins again.

The most significant gains noted in each participating school were in the areas of: (1) reading; (2) independent work habits; (3) growth in general skills in relation to classmates; (4) attention span; (5) discipline referrals to the principal.

It has also been noted that as a result of this program, referrals for Psychological Services in the involved schools have been reduced to almost zero. The parents have been especially supportive and have voluntarily written letters to the Board of Education, and to various administrators expressing appreciation. Also, while it is not an easy assignment in terms of committment and time, there have been important benefits to the psychologist as well. Traditional evaluations (testing and writing psychological reports) occur after the problem has become severe enough to warrant a Psychological Referral, as opposed to this more interventive model. Weighing the benefits of the two approaches, "Unmet Needs" appears to offer a very effective approach to helping children improve their adjustment to school and/or family. Certainly, it is a more humanistic approach to evaluating behavior.

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